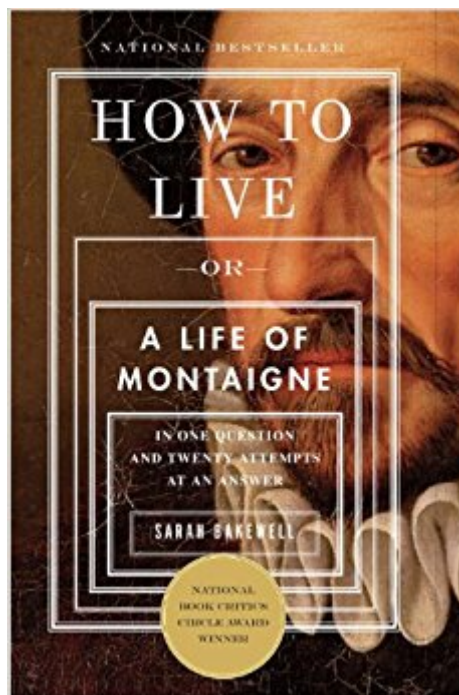




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# **How To Live: Or A Life Of Montaigne In One Question And Twenty Attempts At An Answer**



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2010 National Book Critics Circle Award for Biography  
How to get along with people, how to deal with violence, how to adjust to losing someone you love—such questions arise in most people's lives. They are all versions of a bigger question: How do you live? This question obsessed Renaissance writers, none more than Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, considered by many to be the first truly modern individual. He wrote free-roaming explorations of his thoughts and experience, unlike anything written before. More than four hundred years later, Montaigne's honesty and charm still draw people to him. Readers come to him in search of companionship, wisdom, and entertainment—and in search of themselves. Just as they will to this spirited and singular biography.

## Book Information

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Other Press; Reprint edition (September 20, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1590514831

ISBN-13: 978-1590514832

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.1 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 193 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #37,776 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > European > French #20 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Philosophers #96 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > History & Surveys

## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** In a wide-ranging intellectual career, Michel de Montaigne found no knowledge so hard to acquire as the knowledge of how to live this life well. By casting her biography of the writer as 20 chapters, each focused on a different answer to the question How to live? Bakewell limns Montaigne's ceaseless pursuit of this most elusive knowledge. Embedded in the 20 life-knowledge responses, readers will find essential facts—when and where Montaigne was born, how and whom he married, how he became mayor of Bordeaux, how he managed a public life in a time of lethal religious and political passions. But Bakewell keeps the focus on the inner evolution of the acute mind informing Montaigne's charmingly digressive and tolerantly skeptical essays.

Flexible and curious, this was a mind at home contemplating the morality of cannibals, the meaning of his own near-death experience, and the puzzlingly human behavior of animals. And though Montaigne has identified his own personality as his overarching topic, Bakewell marvels at the way Montaigne's prose has enchanted diverse readers—Hazlitt and Sterne, Woolf and Gide—with their own reflections. Because Montaigne's capacious mirror still captivates many, this insightful life study will win high praise from both scholars and general readers. --Bryce Christensen --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

• This charming biography shuffles incidents from Montaigne's life and essays into twenty thematic chapters | Bakewell clearly relishes the anthropological anecdotes that enliven Montaigne's work, but she handles equally well both his philosophical influences and the readers and interpreters who have guided the reception of the essays. • "The New Yorker" Serious, engaging, and so infectiously in love with its subject that I found myself racing to finish so I could start rereading the Essays themselves | It is hard to imagine a better introduction—or reintroduction—to Montaigne than Bakewell's book. • "Lorin Stein, Harper's Magazine" Ms. Bakewell's new book, *How to Live*, is a biography, but in the form of a delightful conversation across the centuries. • "The New York Times" So artful is Bakewell's account of [Montaigne] that even skeptical readers may well come to share her admiration. • "The New York Times Book Review" Extraordinary | a miracle of complex, revelatory organization, for as Bakewell moves along she provides a brilliant demonstration of the alchemy of historical viewpoint. • "Boston Globe" Well, *How to Live* is a superb book, original, engaging, thorough, ambitious, and wise. • "Nick Hornby, in the November/December 2010 issue of *The Believer*" In *How to Live*, an affectionate introduction to the author, Bakewell argues that, far from being a dusty old philosopher, Montaigne has never been more relevant—a 16th-century blogger, as she would have it—and so must be read, quite simply, in order to live | Bakewell is a wry and intelligent guide. • "The Daily Beast" Witty, unorthodox | *How to Live* is a history of ideas told entirely on the ground, never divorced from the people thinking them. It hews close to Montaigne's own preoccupations, especially his playful uncertainty • "Bakewell is a stickler for what we can't know. | *How to Live* is a delight" • "The Plain Dealer" This book will have new readers excited to be acquainted to Montaigne's life and ideas, and may even stir their curiosity to read more about the ancient Greek philosophers who influenced his writing. *How to Live* is a great companion to Montaigne's essays, and even a great stand-alone. • "San Francisco Book Review" A bright, genial, and generous introduction

to the master's methods. • "Kirkus Reviews" [Bakewell reveals] one of literature's enduring figures as an idiosyncratic, humane, and surprisingly modern force. • "Publisher's Weekly (starred)" As described by Sarah Bakewell in her suavely enlightening *How to Live, or A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer* Montaigne is, with Walt Whitman, among the most congenial of literary giants, inclined to shrug over the inevitability of human failings and the last man to accuse anyone of self-absorption. His great subject, after all, was himself. • "Laura Miller, Salon.com" Lively and fascinating . . . *How To Live* takes its place as the most enjoyable introduction to Montaigne in the English language. • "The Times Literary Supplement" Splendidly conceived and exquisitely written . . . enormously absorbing. • "Sunday Times" How to Live will delight and illuminate. • "The Independent" It is ultimately [Montaigne's] life-loving vivacity that Bakewell succeeds in communicating to her readers. • "The Observer" This subtle and surprising book manages the trick of conversing in a frank and friendly manner with its centuries-old literary giant, as with a contemporary, while helpfully placing Montaigne in a historical context. The affection of the author for her subject is palpable and infectious. • "Phillip Lopate, author of *The Art of the Personal Essay*" An intellectually lively treatment of a Renaissance giant and his world. • "Saturday Telegraph" Like recent books on Proust, Joyce, and Austen, *How to Live* skillfully plucks a life-guide from the incessant flux of Montaigne's prose . . . A superb, spirited introduction to the master. • "The Guardian" [How to Live] is written in the form of a delightful conversation across the ages with one of the most appealing, likeable writers who ever lived. • "Independent Mail" More than just a straightforward biography of Michel de Montaigne, Sarah Bakewell cleverly breaks away from chronology to explore the fundamental questions of living through the philosophy, beliefs, essays and experiences of the French master we often reference as the "father of the essay." • "Cerise Press" [A] must-read in its entirety." • "Brainpickings" Bakewell's writing style is equal parts fluid and fascinating." • "The Financial Times" Turtle

A little dry in the middle but both ends were thought provoking and enjoyable, so much so that I rate it 5 stars. We should all examine ourselves, taking a practical look at our lives like Montaigne did his. I'm not a wealthy nobleman but we're not so different. One thing we all share is the reality that our time is short. We do well to discover what this is all about as quickly as possible. Reading this book has helped to focus me, to understand mine a little more.

Montaigne was a French essayist and philosopher who lived in the middle to late 1500's. He, for all

intents and purposes pioneered the essay as a literary form. He wrote about life and how to live it. His point of view is his own experience, but he was widely read in classical philosophy and inserts quotes in his writing to illustrate the points he is trying to make. Bakewell's book is both a biography and an introduction to Montaigne's ideas. She provides considerable background information on the man and the world he lived in. I am reading Donald Frame's translation of Montaigne along with Bakewell's book and I highly recommend this approach. The man can and does speak for himself, but Bakewell puts it all in context for you. She clearly has a tremendous command of her subject and presents it in a very readable way.

I liked what he has to say about living life. Sarah Bakewell helps the reader to understand the Essays and the individual who wrote them. This world would be a much better place if each of us would embrace and practice many of his beliefs.

An engaging portrait of Montaigne and his times, Bakewell helps us understand his impact on our views of life, society and how we relate with each other. Knowing the man leads us to read his "Essais" with a fresh appreciation of his wisdom, self-awareness, humor and *joie de vivre*. The author weaves appealing stories of Montaigne's skillful navigating through a stormy world of familial, social, political and religious strife. This is a great companion to Montaigne's own thoughts and sets the stage for us to follow his practical and thoughtful model of introspection and living an examined and fulfilled life.

I knew Montaigne as a 16th century creator of the 'personal essay' and many a 'bon mot.' In Sarah Bakewell's insightful discussion of his life and times-- frequently using Montaigne's own voice-- he comes across as a man of and in the world who was able to maintain a personal balance as he sought to carry out professional, civic and family duties during one of the most tumultuous and dangerously polarized historical periods (religious civil wars of France.) By developing exquisite observational powers using himself as a subject, he demonstrates how to remain a human being while enduring loss, pressure, and relentless conflict. Simultaneously, he managed to retain his '*joie de vivre*' and life-giving curiosity. I can think of few role models who offer us a better antidote to our tumultuous times. This serves as an excellent introduction to Montaigne's work and thought. My highest compliment is that I am now looking forward to actually reading his essays! Who knew a 16th century Epicurean could become a best friend?

This is a book that that I am devouring slowly like a fine meal. I haven't read much philosophy since collage years (some time ago) and never experienced feeling like I understood the philosopher as a living, breathing person at that time like this book seems to capture Montaigne as being. I love the historical context of both the time period and of how Montaigne's philosophies fit into the various ways thinkers have viewed the world. I did find the description of his early adult years pretty dry, but it was worth wading through to understand the impact a significant loss had on the rest of his life, and therefor (though I am not finished) how he saw the world.

I admire Michel Montaigne essays very much. In its original version, the essays are very well written. He elucidated every topic in depth, and also included a kind of autobiography. It is a wonderful book. What Sarah Bakewell did was to take the essence of Montaigne's individual pieces and trimmed them in such a way that simplifies them and made them more approachable to those who would like a more direct approach to the essays.

Bakewell sheds light on Montaigne's early years and then offers a sampling of his writings. The book is thoroughly readable and interesting and more important, it lives up to its title. I came away with valuable suggestions on how to deal with life's difficulties. Having said that, it was easier for Montaigne to provide how-to's, as he was unemployed but living on his lavish estate. For a twenty-first century person unemployed and in poverty his advice may be seen as too abstract for today's real world. .

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